

MEXICO

Reading Essentials and Study Guide 3

Mexico Today

Key Terms

plaza public square

adobe sun-dried clay bricks

federal republic type of government in which power is divided between national and state governments and a strong president leads the national government

migrant worker worker who travels from place to place to plant or harvest crops when needed

national debt money owed by the government

smog haze of fog and chemicals in the air

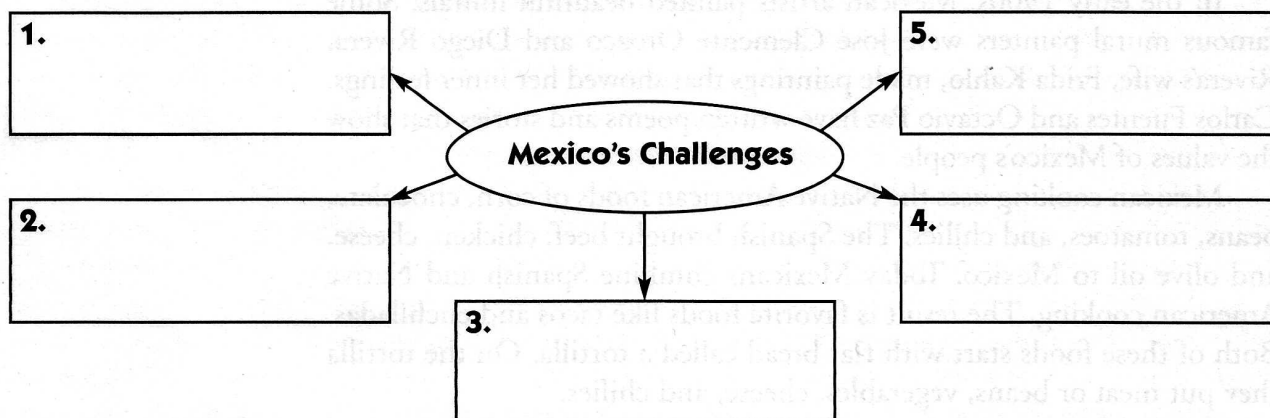
Drawing From Experience

Have you ever eaten a taco or burrito? How are these foods different from other kinds of foods you eat? Do you think you could tell Mexican food from other kinds?

In the last section, you learned about Mexico's history. This section discusses Mexico's culture and government today.

Organizing Your Thoughts

Use the diagram below to help you take notes. In each box, list a challenge that Mexico faces today.



MEXICO**Reading Essentials and Study Guide 3 (continued)****Read to Learn****Introduction**

Mexico is the third-largest country in size in Latin America. Brazil and Argentina are larger. Almost three-fourths of all Mexicans live in the country's busy cities.

6. Where do most Mexicans live?

Mexico's Cities and Villages

Plazas are public squares. Mexican cities often have a large plaza in the center. Important buildings stand around the plaza. These buildings often have a Spanish style. Newer parts of cities also have tall glass office buildings and modern houses. In poor sections, people build homes out of whatever they can find. They may use sheet metal or even cardboard.

Villages in the countryside also have plazas. The people often build homes of **adobe**, or sun-dried bricks. The roofs may be straw or colored tile.

7. What is at the center of many Mexican cities and villages?

Mexican Culture

In the early 1900s, Mexican artists painted beautiful murals. Some famous mural painters were José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera. Rivera's wife, Frida Kahlo, made paintings that showed her inner feelings. Carlos Fuentes and Octavio Paz have written poems and stories that show the values of Mexico's people.

Mexican cooking uses the Native American foods of corn, chocolate, beans, tomatoes, and chilies. The Spanish brought beef, chicken, cheese, and olive oil to Mexico. Today Mexicans combine Spanish and Native American cooking. The result is favorite foods like tacos and enchiladas. Both of these foods start with flat bread called a tortilla. On the tortilla they put meat or beans, vegetables, cheese, and chilies.

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Mexicans call their celebrations fiestas. Their special days include parades, fireworks, music, and dancing. Mariachi bands play traditional music. Many fiestas today feature the fast rhythms of Latino bands.

Two national holidays are Independence Day (September 16) and Cinco de Mayo (May 5). This holiday honors the day in 1862 that Mexicans defeated an invading French army. November 2 is a religious holiday. It is called the Day of the Dead. Families gather on this day and honor their loved ones who have passed on.

8. What two kinds of cooking do Mexicans combine in their tacos and enchiladas?

Mexico's Government

Like the United States, Mexico is a **federal republic**. The power is divided between national and state governments. A president leads the national government. Unlike the United States, Mexico's national government has much more power than the states.

The Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) has been the only political party in Mexico for many years. All presidents and most others elected to office belonged to this party. In recent years, Mexico has had economic troubles. Also, the people are growing angry because they do not have much say in the government. In 2000, for the first time in more than 70 years, the new president, Vicente Fox, came from a different political party.

Mexico's government faces many difficult challenges. People in Mexico want more political freedom to make decisions that affect their everyday lives. The government is concerned about traffic in illegal drugs. Nearly 40 percent of Mexico's 100 million people live below the poverty line. A strong central government is needed to fight problems. President Fox must also increase democracy by giving power back to local and state agencies. He will have to help his country find the balance between these two levels of government.

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Reading Essentials and Study Guide 3 (continued)

9. How is Mexico's government like the government of the United States?

Mexico's Challenges

Mexico's population is growing fast. Many people are moving to cities to find jobs. Most have been forced to take jobs with low pay. As a result, sections of cities are crowded with thousands of poor people.

Mexicans who cannot find work in Mexico may become **migrant workers**. They travel from place to place to plant or pick crops wherever farmers need extra workers. Some legally or illegally cross the border to work in the United States. These workers make little in either country, but the pay is better in the United States.

Another challenge involves the descendants of the ancient Maya Indians in a southern area called Chiapas. Over 75 percent of these people live below the poverty level. Diseases and illness that result from the poverty and a lack of health care cause thousands of people to die every year. Many Maya have rebelled because they believe the Mexican government will never help improve their lives. The army they formed is still fighting for independence from the central government.

In the past, Mexican leaders did not want companies from other countries to build factories in Mexico. They feared that the companies would take their profits back to their own countries. This would drain money out of Mexico. The leaders changed their minds in the 1990s. Now they want these factories to create jobs for Mexicans. They still fear that money will leave the country, however.

To help its economy grow, Mexico borrowed money from banks in other countries. The government had to use taxes to pay back the loans. Leaders had little money left to spend on the Mexican people. The people grew angry. Still, Mexico must pay back its loans. Otherwise, no one will lend it money for future plans. Mexico still faces the problem of repaying the money it owes, or its **national debt**.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

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The factories and growing population in cities have caused pollution. The mountains around Mexico City trap car fumes. As a result, a thick haze of fog and chemicals, or **smog**, hangs over the city. In the north, factories put harmful chemicals into the air and water. The Rio Grande is now polluted.

10. Why do migrant workers cross the border to work in the United States?
